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Reflux Esophagitis or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

I have been involved in a private family practice for well over 30 years. One of the complaints that have increased dramatically over the past 10 years in my patients is *heart burn* and *acid reflux* symptoms. The use of drugs like Prilosec, Nexium, Zantac, Pepcid, and Aciphex has also increased dramatically. In fact, one of the more common email consultations I deal with are questions about acid reflux and what one can do *naturally* to improve this problem.

Reflux Esophagitis Defined

The esophagus is the muscular tube that connects our mouth to our stomach. The circular muscles of the esophagus contract in a coordinated manner to deliver the food and liquid we eat or drink efficiently into the stomach. While no actual valve exists between the esophagus and the stomach, stomach acid normally does *not* reflux back into the lower esophagus because of "lower esophageal pressure." However, if this pressure decreases for any reason, acid can easily flow backwards from the stomach up into the lower esophagus. The esophagus does not have a natural protective barrier against acid (as does the lining of the stomach), and any portion of the lower esophagus that is exposed to stomach acid is literally burned. The acid causes the release of a tremendous amount of free radicals which leads to oxidative stress and a tremendous amount of inflammation and damage to the lower esophagus. Repeated or chronic exposure of the esophagus to stomach acid can lead to significant damage over time… and can even lead to esophageal cancer.

The symptoms of reflux esophagitis are primarily heart burn, substernal chest pressure or pain, and even choking. The longer this problem exists the greater the possibility of developing "chronic reflux esophagitis" (esophageal stricture or narrowing of the esophagus) and a condition called "Barrett's esophagus" (a pre-cancerous lesion).

A symptom that concerns me the most is when one of my patients begins complaining that their food is actually sticking in their throat or chest. It feels like their food is literally getting stuck before it gets into the stomach. Physicians refer to this symptom as "dysphagia." *This symptom cannot be ignored.* Dysphagia could be a sign of esophageal stricture, Barrett's esophagus, or even cancer. When I hear this complaint, I immediately refer my patients to a GI specialist so that they can look directly down into their lower esophagus and stomach through a scope-called an EGD.

Causes of Reflux

Increased abdominal pressure due to central obesity is the most common reason patients begin to reflux their stomach acid into their lower esophagus. When you begin gaining weight around your middle, the increased abdominal pressure can literally force acid out of your stomach back up into your esophagus. This increased pressure can eventually force a portion of your stomach back up into the chest, a condition called a "hiatal hernia." You can have reflux without having a hiatal hernia; and you can have a hiatal hernia and not have problems with acid reflux. However, these two conditions are commonly associated.

Esophageal pressure can be decreased by many things; things like chocolate, spicy or greasy foods, caffeine (even decaf coffee), alcohol, aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication, carbonated beverages, and high-glycemic carbohydrates. You may even be aware of other foods that can set off reflux symptoms. Reflux can be experienced after eating a large meal; some patients can even have reflux symptoms if they lie down too soon following a regular meal.

Another cause of reflux is the result of a GI infection called "H. Pylori." Have your physician check for the possibility of this infection any time your symptoms of reflux persist or become chronic in nature. Once this infection is effectively treated, the symptoms of reflux usually go away permanently.

Traditional Medical Treatment

To treat acid reflux, most physicians will prescribe medication that decreases the production of stomach acid. These medications generally fall into two different categories: 1) The H2 blockers like Zantac, Pepcid, and Tagamet and 2) the proton pump inhibitors like Prilosec, Nexium, or Aciphex. Another category of medications include drugs like Reglan and Propulsid (which has been removed from the market), which increase esophageal motility. These drugs push food and acid into the stomach more effectively and possibly increase the lower esophageal pressure.

The proton pump inhibitors are much more potent than the H2 blockers at decreasing the stomach acid you can produce and usually improve reflux symptoms fairly effectively. However, they are very difficult to quit once you have been on them for any length of time. When you discontinue drugs like Prilosec or Nexium, a "rebound phenomenon" occurs as the body begins to make more stomach acid than you have ever made in your life. When that happens, acid reflux symptoms usually return with a vengeance. This leads many physicians to conclude that the patient has a *chronic* reflux problem that requires them staying on this medication for the rest their life. (Drug companies don't want you or your doctor to know about this rebound, and that this is why so many people are just not able to get off these drugs.) Once I feel that my patient's esophagitis has healed, I recommend that they discontinue their proton pump inhibitors and take an H2 blocker like Pepcid AC twice daily for three weeks. Since the H2 blockers do not create this "rebound phenomenon", they are able to get through this rebound time. Then they are able to discontinue the Pepcid and generally do very well.

Nutritional Medicine and Reflux Esophagitis

The nutritional medicine approach to improving reflux is multifaceted. As mentioned earlier, the reflux of acid causes a significant increase in free radical production that causes inflammation of the lower esophageal area. This area quickly becomes depleted in antioxidants and their supporting nutrients. Since the main concern is the high risk of developing esophageal cancer, aggressive nutritional supplementation is necessary. Building up these nutrients to optimal levels and providing an abundance of antioxidants is a primary concern.

I would also recommend that you begin the Healthy for Life Program located at www.releasingfat.com , and jump-start this program with Usana's RESET KIT. Besides the obvious life-long improvement in your overall health, this program will help those struggling with acid reflux for two main reasons: First, participants in this program will lose a significant amount of central weight, thus reducing the abdominal pressure that can be forcing acid up into the esophagus. Second, patients' symptoms improve rather quickly in the majority of cases as soon as they begin to eliminate high-glycemic carbohydrates. I have become very suspicious (although I have never seen any studies that have documented this) that high-glycemic carbohydrates decrease the lower esophageal sphincter pressure. All I know is that my nurse practitioners and I have noted significant improvements in acid reflux symptoms in the majority of my patients with reflux esophagitis *if* they combine an aggressive nutritional supplement program with the healthy lifestyle changes that are promoted in the Healthy for Life Program.

Conclusion

If you or someone you know is dealing with recurrent symptoms of acid reflux, have it checked out by a physician. If you have an H. Pylori infection that is not treated appropriately, you will usually not see any permanent improvement no matter what you do. Most importantly, it is critical to find out if you have a more serious problem like a Barrett's esophagus or esophageal cancer. If you find out that you have Barrett's esophagus, your doctor will follow you closely because this is a known pre-cancerous lesion of the lower esophagus. (In this case, increase your CoQ10 to 4 per day. I feel that this can give you the best chance of preventing the progression to esophageal cancer.)

My best advice is to treat this problem medically via traditional evaluation and medical treatment, and begin an aggressive nutritional program and the Healthy for Life Program. Once you begin feeling much better and your symptoms of reflux improve (usually 6 to 8 weeks), I would try to get off your medication. If you are taking any proton pump inhibitor, you may need to follow the plan I have shared above.

If you have acid reflux, hope and help is available. But don't just settle for quick relief. Seriously look at your lifestyles and make a commitment to permanent, life-enhancing improvements. You may have to avoid certain foods (especially high-glycemic carbs), not eat anything within two hours of reclining, get down to your ideal weight, and continue an aggressive nutritional supplement program. These changes will do far more than give you relief from that nagging heart-burn… they could save you from dealing with life threatening cancer. So get medical treatment for the symptoms and then begin to optimize your life through the *Healthy for Life Program* that includes aggressive nutritional supplementation.

Minimal support for [Cellular Nutrition](#) :

My minimal recommendation for creating [cellular nutrition](#) is to simply take an Antioxidant Tablet and Mineral Tablet that contains as close to the recommended nutrients you can see by clicking on each particular nutrient or tablet. Several nutritional companies are now combining most of these nutrients into one or two different tablets, which makes it much more convenient to get the cellular nutrition that I recommend. The Antioxidant and Mineral Tablets need to offer the cell ALL of the antioxidants, B-cofactors, and antioxidant minerals needed by the cell at ideal levels. In order to achieve the best results, in general I recommend taking 2 Antioxidant Tablets and 2 Mineral Tablets in the AM with breakfast and in the PM with your evening meal. Now the exact amount may vary with the particular nutritional company you choose; however, nutritional should always be taken with food because of better absorption and better tolerance.

Optimal support for [Cellular Nutrition](#) :

For the most favorable results for basic [cellular nutrition](#) , I also recommend adding to the Antioxidant Tablet and Mineral Tablet some additional Calcium/Magnesium Tablets and essential fats. You are able to get additional essential fatty acids from high-quality Flax Seed Oil or pharmaceutical-grade, filtered Fish Oil Capsules. These recommendations provide all the nutrients at their ideal levels creating the cellular nutrition I recommend in my book, *What Your Doctor Doesn't Know About Nutritional Medicine* .

Enhancers

It is critical that you know the necessity of adding Enhancers, which contain additional potent antioxidants, to your foundational cellular nutrition for optimal results. Patients who are suffering from a chronic degenerative disease or illness are producing more free radicals and are under more oxidative stress than the average healthy individual. Therefore, adding potent Enhancers to the basic cellular nutrition I recommend offers you the best chance to bring this oxidative stress back under control. The synergy and increased potency created by this approach to nutritional medicine is why I'm able to get such consistent improvement in the health of my patients.

However, in order to suit each individual's unique financial situation, I always offer both an optimal and a minimal plan for [cellular nutrition](#) and for adding Enhancers. Obviously, one's improvement of their health will be more consistent with the optimal recommendations; however, a minimal regime can still produce significant improvement in your health.

Recommended Enhancers:

Minimal:

- Calcium/Magnesium Tablet - 4 tablets daily

Optimal:

- Calcium/Magnesium Tablet - 4 tablets daily

Optimal Recommendations

Nutritional Supplement	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Antioxidant Tablet	2		2
Mineral Tablet	2		2
Calcium/Magnesium Tablet	2		2
Flax Seed Oil	1 tsp		1 tsp
Fish Oil Capsule (may substitute for Flax Seed Oil)	1		1

Minimal Recommendation

Nutritional Supplement	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Antioxidant Tablet	2		2
Mineral Tablet	2		2
Calcium/Magnesium Tablet	2		2

Choosing High-Quality Nutritional Supplements

One of the most difficult aspects of being involved in nutritional medicine is the fact that nutritional supplement companies are basically an uncontrolled industry. The FDA looks at supplements like foods. Nutritional companies are really not required to put in their tablets what they say is on their label. The quality of products that is placed in most supplements is of inferior quality and their manufacturing processes are generally suspect. People who have read my books or used this web site will sometimes go out to their local chain stores, drug stores, or health food stores and try to put together my recommendations on their own. The frustrating thing about this is that they think that they are doing what I am recommending only to either not get any health benefits from their efforts or very marginal results.

When you look at my nutritional recommendations for the Antioxidant tablet and Mineral tablet, you will quickly realize that you cannot get this amount of supplementation in a simple daily multivitamin. However, some companies are now putting all of the needed nutrients together in one or two different pills. In order to achieve the optimal levels I recommend, you will most likely need to take several (four to eight tablets) daily. The more antioxidants you take and the more variation your supplement provides the better. Also be sure that you are getting all the recommended levels of the minerals and the B-cofactors.

You need to spend a little time investigating the nutritional company you choose. You can locate information on the company's website or you may need to call the company directly. Most importantly, you want a company that follows pharmaceutical-grade Good Manufacturing

Practices (GMP). This means that they purchase pharmaceutical-grade raw materials and then follow pharmaceutical-grade Good Manufacturing Practices in producing their supplements. These companies produce what is called pharmaceutical-grade supplements, meaning similar guidelines are followed for manufacturing their products as companies making over-the-counter or prescription medications. The government does not require the manufacturers of nutritional supplements to do this; still, some nutritional companies put this extra effort into the manufacturing of their products to provide their customers with the assurance that they are getting what is on the label. These high-quality manufacturers will put the actual amounts of the nutrients found in their products on the label and give full disclosure of all the ingredients. You also want to find an expiration date on the bottle and the company's full address.

Another aspect of quality that needs to be considered is whether or not the manufacturer of your nutritional supplements follows what are known as U.S. Pharmacopoeia (USP) standards. These are government guidelines that assure consumers that their medications and supplement tablets are of the highest quality and will dissolve properly and be readily absorbed into the body. Pharmaceutical-grade GMP's would be rendered worthless if the company does not also follow USP standards for the dissolution of their tablets. If the tablet does not dissolve properly, it does not matter what they put in them. Choosing a company that follows the USP guidelines is certainly a step in the right direction.

Balance and completeness is another very critical aspect of choosing a high-quality nutritional supplement. Just like there are drug-interactions, there are also nutrient interactions that can create poor absorption and poor interactions. This is probably the most difficult aspect for the average consumer to really know or understand. Therefore it is critical to choose a company that understands completeness and balance in their products.

Another aspect to consider when you are researching a particular company is where it markets its products. A company that markets internationally usually has to follow higher standards than those who market only in the United States. Canada, Australia, and Western European countries have the highest standards for the manufacturing of nutritional supplements. Canada and Australia presently have some of the most restrictive requirements for nutritional supplements.

Starting Your Nutritional Program

Over 80 to 90% of my patients are able to start taking their nutritional supplements with absolutely no problems. The cellular nutrition that I recommend provides nutrients that you get from foods but at levels you just are not able to obtain from your foods. These are not herbs nor do they have any pharmaceutical properties. They are merely nutrients that our bodies need to function at its optimal level. My cellular nutritional recommendations have been developed to provide all the essential nutrients to the cell at these optimal or advance levels that have been shown to provide a health benefit in our medical literature. The level of the nutritional provided in these recommendations are all well within safe parameters. However, you will be nourishing your body more effectively than you have ever nourished it before. The medical literature has shown us that when you supplement your body with these high quality, complete and balanced nutritional supplements that there are several health benefits. Remember, taking supplements is

about health not disease. Over time of supplementing a good diet and exercise program, you will not only optimize your body's natural antioxidant defense system, but also, its natural immune and repair system. Your body will also now be able to begin to remove waste products (toxins) more effectively from the body. A small percentage of my patients (less than 10 to 20%) may experience some mild detoxification reactions.

Detoxification:

The most common detoxification reaction is mild muscle aches and/or mild headaches. These symptoms will usually pass within a few days to a week or two. If the discomfort is not unbearable, I simply have my patients continue their nutritional supplements as I have recommended. However, occasionally there is a more severe reaction. The patient is not in danger; rather, the amounts of nutrients are just too much too fast. In this case, I have my patients quit their supplements for a few days until the reaction subsides. I will then have them start back on their program but initially at lower doses (approximately one third of the recommended dose). Once they are tolerating this amount of supplementation, I suggest slowly building up to the recommended doses.

Some of my patients actually develop a "detox" skin rash somewhere on their body. As you know, the skin is an important route for ridding the body's toxins. This rash is a dry, red rash that looks almost like a mild sunburn. Some people confuse this with an allergic reaction to the supplements. I have never seen an allergic reaction to the high-quality nutritional supplements I recommend.

Patients may also experience some aspect of loose stools or even diarrhea. This again is a common "detox" reaction because the GI tract is another prime route for eliminating toxins from the body. This symptom will usually diminish within 7 to 10 days. It is an important part of the detoxification and healing process. Therefore, I usually encourage my patients to continue the supplements as recommended unless their bottom gets too sore. I will then again recommend lower doses of the supplements until they feel better and then begin adding the supplements back more slowly until the recommended doses are reached.

Natural Relaxation Response:

A small percentage of patients develop a natural relaxation response when minerals are absorbed into their body. This is of great concern to those patients who have just been told that nutritional supplementation may potentially improve their energy level. They take the supplements as recommended only to find themselves more fatigued and dragging themselves around throughout their day. If you experience this response, I recommend that you take all of your minerals with a light bedtime snack. This allows you to take advantage of your body's response while getting a good night's sleep.

Stomach Upset:

A small percentage of patients have difficulty tolerating vitamin C. It can cause an upset stomach that will usually become evident a couple days after starting their nutritional program.

The vitamin C I recommend usually is found in the Antioxidant Tablet. If you are experiencing significant nausea, I suggest taking just one Antioxidant Tablet with the largest meal. Once this level of supplementation is better tolerated, I suggest slowly adding another Antioxidant Tablet to the next largest meal. I anticipate building them up to the recommended level of supplementation, but sometimes this is just not possible. For those extremely sensitive, I advise just taking the amount of Antioxidant Tablets that they can tolerate even if this is just one or two per day.

Disclaimer

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